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Students on campus during winter break find ways to have fun

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MATTHEW CAVANAUGH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Alheri Egor-Egbe (left) and Korantema Dampety shared a meal on winter break.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 04, 2015

In many ways, Amanda Diehl is enjoying a typical holiday season. She savored her favorite red-, green-, and white-colored Christmas-themed cookies. She and her family woke up early Christmas morning and, still wearing pajamas, watched each other unwrap gifts.

But instead of pulling her presents from underneath a glowing tree or picking up baked goods fresh from the store, Diehl unpacked them all from a cardboard box that arrived in the mail at her Somerville apartment. And she only got to celebrate virtually, via Skype, with her parents and younger brother, who were back home more than 1,000 miles away in Florida.

“The actual day of Christmas was a little bit of a drag,” said Diehl, a graduate student at Emerson College who, for the first time, was not home for the holiday. “But I went to the movies and kept

myself busy and distracted, so it got better.”

Diehl, 25, is one of hundreds of students at area colleges who, unlike most of their classmates and professors, stick around nearly deserted campuses instead of going home or visiting with relatives during the winter break.

Colleges close most, if not all, of their dormitories, dining halls, and other facilities during the break, which typically lasts four to six weeks. Campuses become ghost towns, and in college cities like Boston, the exodus frees up parking spaces as well as bar and restaurant seating in surrounding neighborhoods.

Many of the students who stay behind hail from other countries and view the break as too short and the airfare as too expensive to journey home. Others stay because of jobs or internships or because they play on a college sports team.

For some, it can be boring and lonely, but others say they enjoy the peaceful atmosphere.

“It’s really quiet, which I like,” said Alheri Egor-Egbe, a 20-year-old sophomore at Mount Holyoke College from Nigeria who is spending her third winter break away from home. “It works perfectly for me. It’s nice to relax after a long semester.”

Egor-Egbe is one of about 160 students at the South Hadley school who are staying on campus throughout most, if not all, of the break. During that span, students live in one dormitory, Creighton Hall.

Egor-Egbe was forced to move out of the dorm she normally lives in but said she didn’t mind relocating. “You always have to move when you’re in school,” she said.

She and some of her friends and dormmates spent Christmas putting up decorations, cooking for one another, and calling relatives back home. While Egor-Egbe misses friends and family in Nigeria, she is thankful she’s not alone during the holidays.

“It’s good to have company and spend some time talking or watching TV or just hanging out,” she said.



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Alheri Egor-Egbe of Nigeria and Korantema Dampety of Ghana spent Christmas putting up decorations, cooking for each other, and calling relatives back home.

Korantema Dampitey, a Mount Holyoke sophomore from Ghana, stayed on campus for the first time this break.

“I expected to be sad and miss home, but I don’t really because there’s so many of us here,” Dampitey said. “And we’re all living in the same building so it doesn’t feel as empty.”

Some, particularly international students, spend their break sight-seeing.

Northeastern University student Anya Tran, who grew up in Russia, toured New York City and planned to venture to Philadelphia and Providence, as well. Tran is staying at her off-campus apartment during the break because she is scheduled to start a co-op working for a BitCoin startup company in South Boston early this month.

In between her regional travels, Tran has been reading, drawing, listening to music, and doing some Christmas-themed decorating. Both of her roommates went home for the holidays.

“There are times I really miss my family and I’m homesick, but I just tell myself, ‘It’s OK, it’s life, you just have to stay busy and find something interesting to do,’ ” she said.

Chiamaka Chima, a graduate student at Tufts University, has grown accustomed to spending winter breaks around campus. A native of Nigeria, she has gone home only twice during her five years at Tufts.

“I remember the first time I was here I was like, ‘Oh my God, I’m never staying here during Christmas again,’ ” said Chima, who is spending the holidays in her apartment near campus. “But there are a lot of other students who are international and stay here, and eventually you get used to it.”

And Chima said she’s still able to keep in touch with far-away friends and relatives. “Everyone is on Facebook and Skype, so technology definitely helps a lot,” she said.



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